

Third Judicial District Courthouse  
("Jefferson Market Courthouse," now Jefferson  
Market Branch, New York Public Library)  
425 Avenue of the Americas  
New York  
New York County  
New York

HABS No. NY-4392

HABS  
NY,  
31-NEYO,  
65-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
801 19th Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006

THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURTHOUSE  
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Address: 425 Avenue of the Americas, northwest corner of West Tenth Street and Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York County, New York.

Present Owner: The Mayor, Aldermen and Commonalty of the City of New York.

Present Occupant: New York Public Library.

Present Use: Jefferson Market Branch, New York Public Library.

Statement of Significance: Originally the Third Judicial District Courthouse was part of a complex which included a police court, jail, and markets. An outstanding example of civic design, the complex occupied the entire triangular block bounded by Sixth Avenue, West Tenth Street, and Greenwich Avenue. The structure was built from 1874 to 1877 to designs by Withers and Vaux and was re-habilitated from 1965 to 1967 as a branch of the New York Public Library.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Grantee</u>
3/9/1870 Liber 1151, page 291.	Parker Amasa J. Kidd James	The Mayor, Aldermen and Commonalty of the City of New York

2. Date of erection: Preparation for construction of the courthouse was evidently begun by October 2, 1873, when the following resolution was introduced to the Board of Aldermen. It was adopted October 28, 1873:

Resolved, That the Commissioner of Public Works be directed to remove all the materials appertaining to the Court-house building, at Jefferson market, now lying in Sixth avenue and West Tenth street, as the same is an obstruction to the streets, a nuisance to the neighborhood, and is detrimental to the public health.

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In October, 1874, temporary quarters were authorized for the courts which were to be located in the new building. The following resolution was introduced October 1, 1874, and adopted October 15, 1874:

Resolved, That the Comptroller be and he is hereby authorized and directed to provide for the Second Police and Third Civil District Courts a suitable temporary location, to be occupied by them during the time occupied in the erection of the new building intended for the use of said courts, now under contract, at a rental not to exceed \$1,800 per annum . . .

The Perris & Brown Insurance Maps of the City of New York for 1874 do not indicate any construction yet at the site of the new building. But a contemporary periodical (The American Architect and Building News, June 15, 1878) states that the building was "commenced in 1874" and in June, 1875, The New-York Sketch-Book of Architecture stated that the building was "now in course of erection . . ."

On January 13, 1876, a resolution was introduced and approved by the Board of Aldermen concerning the connection of the sewer to the building:

Resolved, That the Commissioners for the erection of a Court-house for the Third District (Jefferson Market) be and they are hereby authorized and permitted to connect the said new Court-house building with the sewer in Greenwich avenue, without the payment of the customary fees, under the direction of the Commissioner of Public Works . . .

The building had not been completed by early 1877 as the following resolution, introduced to the Board of Aldermen on January 25, 1877, and adopted on February 8, 1877, indicates:

Resolved, That . . . the said building was not completed as provided by said act, and still remains uncompleted . . .

The American Architect and Building News (June 15, 1878) states that the courthouse was "completed during the past year." This date is confirmed by the following entries in The New York City Register for 1877 when the Third District Civil Court was listed at "12 Gr'wich av." and the Second District Police Court at "Sixth av. c. W. 10th" and by the entries for 1878 when both courts are listed at "125 Sixth av."

3. Architects: Withers & Vaux; Frederick Clark Withers (1828-1901) and Calvert Vaux (1824-1895).
4. Original plan and construction of building: The following article from the American Architect and Building News (June 15, 1878), page 209, describes the original use of the building:

These buildings, commenced in 1874, were completed during the past year, and are located on a triangular plot of ground, formed by Sixth Avenue, Tenth Street, and Greenwich Avenue. The entrance to the court-house is on Sixth Avenue, through a large ornamental archway, into a porch 16 feet square, from thence on the left through a vestibule of the same size to the police court, and on the right by a circular stone staircase to the civil court above; each of these rooms is about 61 feet by 37 feet. An examination room, 37 feet by 24 feet, adjoins the police court, with a room for officers in charge of those awaiting trial, for whom separate rooms are provided in the prison building. The police magistrate's entrance is on Tenth Street, where offices for himself and his clerks are arranged. The rooms for the judge of the civil court are on the second floor adjoining the court room, with an entrance to them through the small tower on Sixth Avenue, in which is a staircase leading also to the rooms of the janitor on the third floor. The clerks of the civil court reach the offices provided for them by the principal staircase in the tower, and the third floor over these offices, and connected with them by a small turret staircase is a fire and burglar-proof room for the records of the court. The tower for the fire-bell is at the acute angle formed by the junction of Sixth Avenue and Tenth Street. The room for the look-out is reached by a separate, spiral stone staircase, with a private entrance from the street; the floor of this room is 98 feet from the sidewalk and above the ridges of all the surrounding roofs, so that an uninterrupted view of the neighborhood is obtained. Between the buildings occupied by the courts and the prison is an enclosed yard with an entrance into the latter so that prisoners may be conveyed to and fro without publicity. The entrance to the prison is on Tenth Street, and leads directly from the porch into a guard-room 24 feet by 14 feet, adjoining which is a small bedroom for the keeper. On this floor are two large waiting or lodging rooms, for male and female prisoners. Accommodation in separate cells is provided on the second floor for 29 female prisoners, and on the floor above, and entirely separated, for 58 male prisoners. Each cell is 8 feet

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by 5 1/2 feet and 9 1/2 feet high. A steam elevator is arranged near the staircase to convey prisoners to their respective quarters, as well as to carry up the supplies from the kitchen which is in the basement. Rooms for the keepers are arranged at the entrance to the male and female prisons, and in connection with each; there are two large cells for the detention of such persons as it may be considered advisable to separate from the ordinary class of prisoners. A small airing court 30 feet by 20 feet is provided in the roof, and reached only by the elevator, so that those prisoners who are detained any length of time may be able to take air and exercise without any possibility of escape.

The buildings are of brick, those of the court-house and bell tower being faced with Philadelphia brick, and those of the prison with Croton fronts. The stone used is from Berlin, Ohio, and its color contrasts well with the red brick. The carving, which forms an important element of the design, was done under the direction of Mr. William Simon. The interior walls of the main halls and staircase are lined with stone, with ornamental arches over the doorways, windows, etc., and enriched with a large amount of carved foliage. The interior of the court-rooms and offices are trimmed with black-walnut and cherry-wood wainscoting, doors, etc., and the floors of the vestibules and halls laid with ornamental tiles. The buildings are heated by steam throughout.

The total cost of the buildings, exclusive of architects' fees, amounts to rather less than \$360,000.

5. Alterations and additions: On November 27, 1918, Plumbing Application 1324/1918, submitted by D.V. Duff, architect, was approved. Plumbing was to be installed on first and second floors. Work was begun by January 15, 1919, and completed by March 30, 1919.

On December 11, 1918, Alteration Application 2079/1918, submitted by D.V. Duff, 2043 Municipal Building, was approved by the Buildings Department. At an estimated cost of "9500" the following was to be done:

Making various changes to the present rooms on second floor, by the building of new stud and plaster partitions and the building of a new fireproof bridge from court building to present prison; also the building of a new mezzanine floor in prison.

This work was begun on January 7, 1919, and completed by May 8, 1919.

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On September 13, 1929, Demolition Notice 273/1929 was submitted and on September 18, 1929, it was approved. Four buildings were to be demolished: "1 brick jail (3 buildings) and 1 Market (Jefferson Market)." Psady & Furman were the demolition contractors.

On May 28, 1939, Building Notice 1851/1939 was submitted; it proposed to

cut opening through brick wall on 2nd floor between Waiting Room and Detention Pen and build wood partition across Waiting Room.

This work was completed by March 8, 1944.

Architects Clay & Corrigill, 144 East 30th Street, received approval for Alteration Application 2093/1946 on October 23, 1946. At an estimated cost of \$11,000 the following work was to be done:

All doors on one existing stair enclosure (except egress door to street, which will be altered to swing out) will be removed and replaced with one-hour test fireproof self-closing Kaleimein [sic] doors. One door opening to stair will be bricked up.

One existing bricked-up opening on second floor will be changed to a window.

One ceiling-height partition will be erected on first floor and spaces will be subdivided on first and second floors with 7'2" high wood, glass and gypsum board partitions.

In 1961 the clock in the tower was electrified as a result of efforts by Greenwich Village citizens. On August 23, 1961, it was announced that the building would be rehabilitated and used as a branch library for the New York Public Library. Giorgio Cavalieri was the architect. Contracts for the work which included cleaning the brick, installing new windows, doors and sash, constructing a walkway across the main reading room, and installing new plumbing, heating, and lighting--were let in 1964. In 1965 construction work was begun and on November 27, 1967, the building was formally opened as a library.

7. Important old views:

- a. Pen and ink drawing of "Sixth Avenue looking north Jefferson Market Court and Prison c. 1880." Negative 45363 at Map and Print Room, New-York Historical Society. (See HABS photocopy).

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- b. Photograph of "Sixth Avenue, Northwest Side and including vesige of Skinner Road, opposite Southeast corner 9th St., seen from East sidewalk North of 8th St., 1936." Map and Print Room, New-York Historical Society.
- c. Photograph of building from north, not dated. Photo archive, Museum of the City of New York.
- d. "Design for Court House, Third Judicial District, New York," The New York Sketchbook-of-Architecture, I (July, 1874), Plate XXVIII.
- e. "Court House, Bell Tower and Prison, Third Judicial District, New York," The New-York Sketch-Book of Architecture, II (June, 1875), Plate XXI.
- f. Photograph of "Jefferson Market Police Court, Sixth Avenue, West Side, from Greenwich Avenue to 10th Street," in King's Handbook, 1895.
- g. Photograph of building from west, dated "1900." Files of Jefferson Market Branch, New York Public Library.
- h. The Public Relations Office of the New York Public Library, Fifth Avenue at Forty-Second Street, has a group of photographs of the building from the collection of Margot Gayle. These include:
  - 1. Photograph 7179, view from North along Sixth Avenue, not dated.
  - 2. Photograph 7164, view East along West 10th Street from Greenwich Avenue and old jail, dated 1926.
  - 3. Photograph 7165, view across Sixth Avenue with elevated line, dated October 21, 1935.

B. Sources of Information

- 1. Original and unpublished sources:

Records of the Buildings Department, Municipal Building, New York, New York.

- 2. Secondary and published sources:

"Contracts Are Let to Convert Court," The New York Times, November 25, 1964, p. 61.

"Court House, Bell Tower and Prison, Third Judicial District, New York," The New-York Sketch-Book of Architecture, II

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(June, 1875), Plate XXI and accompanying text.

"Gothic 'Village' Tower Goes Modern," The New York Times,  
May 7, 1967, VIII, p. 1.

"Greenwich Village Salvation Saga," Progressive Architecture, XLV (November, 1964), 49-50.

"Historic 'Village' Courthouse Begins Library Career," The New York Times, November 28, 1967, p. 46.

Huxtable, Ada Louise. "'Old Jeff's' Conversion," The New York Times, November 28, 1967, pp. 43, 84.

Huxtable, Ada Louise. "Victorian Landmark in Greenwich Village Is to Be Library Branch," The New York Times, September 23, 1964, p. 38.

"Jefferson Market Work to Cost \$1.35 Million," The New York Times, October 22, 1965, p. 7.

"Old Jeff," The New York Times, November 28, 1967, p. 46.

"Old Jeff Escapes the Bulldozer; Village Landmark to be Library," New York Herald Tribune, August 24, 1961.

"A Triumph for Villagers--The Clock's Ticking Again," The New York Times, September 1, 1962, p. 21.

"The Third District Court-House, Bell Tower, and Prison, New York," The American Architect and Building News, III (June 15, 1878), 209 and one plate.

"Village Loves Its 'Old Jeff,' Red Face, Bally Clock and All," New York World Telegram, September 6, 1961.

"'Villagers' Fight to Save Building," The New York Times, February 19, 1961.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural interest and merit: Originally the Third Judicial District Courthouse was part of a complex which included a police court, jail, and markets. An outstanding example of civic design, the complex occupied the entire triangular block bounded by Sixth Avenue, West Tenth Street, and Greenwich Avenue. The structure was built from 1874 to 1877 to designs by Withers and Vaux and was rehabilitated



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from 1965 to 1967 as a branch of the New York Public Library.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Number of stories: Two and one-half stories with full basement.
2. Over-all dimensions: The west facade measures approximately 140 feet and the northwest side measures approximately 67 feet.
3. Layout, shape: The building occupies a triangular corner lot and is irregular in plan.
4. Foundations: On the street facades the foundation walls are faced with granite.
5. Wall construction, finish and color: Walls are of red brick laid up in Flemish bond with granite belt courses and black brick decorative details.
6. Stoops: On the east facade, a stone stoop has modern metal railings and lighting fixture. On the north facade the stone stoop has an old iron railing, apparently original, and modern light fixture.
7. Chimneys: Three red brick chimneys with stone belt course and friezes.
8. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Lancet-arched main entrance has modern glass and bronze-colored aluminum double doors and transom. Above the transom is a stone roundel inscribed "Third Judicial District Court House."
  - b. Windows: On all facades there are some stained glass windows; a few of these are trefoil-arched. Original windows were replaced with modern single-light panes and metal sash.
9. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gabled, mansard and pyramidal roofs are covered with gray sheet metal, which replaced a shingled roof.
  - b. Cornice: Granite cornice and frieze.
  - c. Dormers, towers: On the east facade there is one dormer,

which is faced with brick and carved stone and has two single-light windows. On the north facade is one dormer which is faced with gray sheet metal and has three single-light windows. A dormer on the rear facade is similar to that on the east facade. At the north-east corner of the building there is a clock tower with iron balcony and a pyramidal roof. At the rear of the building is a small wooden tower painted gray. Gargoyles and iron finials surmount the towers and roofs at various points.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans, by floor: Basement: A hallway consisting of brick vaults connects the spiral stairway with the reference room at the south end of the building. First floor: To the west of the main entrance are library staff work areas and an elevator. To the south of the main entrance are a large children's reading room and a smaller room used as an auditorium beyond. A spiral staircase in the tower to the north or the main entrance leads to the second floor. Second floor: Immediately to the south of the staircase is the circulation desk and staff work areas. To the south is the main reading room with three bays on the west side. To the south is a smaller reading room. Third floor: A balcony leads across the main reading room connecting a staff work room in the north section with a staff lounge on the south portion.
2. Stairways: In the clock tower at the north corner of the building, a stone staircase with stone walls leads from the first to second stories; a modern steel spiral staircase painted black runs from basement to first floor. At the south end of the building is a modern concrete staircase with iron railing.
3. Flooring: In the basement and second floor hallways the floors are covered with modern tile. All reading rooms and the auditorium have modern wood parquet floors. The floor of the entrance hall on the first floor is covered with terrazzo with brass strips laid in diamond pattern.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: In the basement hallway and reference room the walls and ceiling consist of red brick vaults laid up in English garden wall bond except for the east wall which is plastered and painted white. On the first floor the children's reading room has plaster walls painted white and a cream colored stucco ceiling with panels painted gold; the auditorium has wooden wainscoting, painted black, plaster walls and paneled ceiling, both painted white. On the second floor the main reading room has plaster walls and paneled ceiling, painted white; the south reading room

has plaster walls and ceiling painted white.

5. Doorways and doors: A modern glass and metal vestibule surrounds the main entrance. Doorways in the hallway on the first floor are limestone with square-headed openings faced with marble. Original carved wood doorways and paneled doors throughout the building have been painted black. On both first and second floors three new doorways faced with marble were cut between the main reading rooms and rooms to the south.
6. Hardware: All hardware is modern.
7. Lighting: Modern neon, recessed and indirect electrical lighting.
8. Heating: Steam heat, produced in the neighboring Women's House of Detention.

C. Site and Surroundings

1. Orientation: The entrance facade faces East and the West 10th Street facade faces northwest.
2. Sidewalks: Concrete sidewalks, contiguous to building, except on the north facade where partly separately by an iron gate, apparently original.

Prepared by Diana S. Waite  
Architectural Historian  
June, 1968